

JASPER, ALA.
MT. EAGLE

E - 9,476

MAY 5 1975

CIA's secrecy vital

When President Ford departed from his prepared text during his State of World address to talk about the Central Intelligence Agency, it was obvious how strongly he feels about what is happening to that agency. The weakening of the CIA due to exposure of its activities under the pressure of congressional investigations, he said, could be "catastrophic" to the security of the United States of America.

Mr. Ford was looking squarely in the eye of some congressmen and senators who have abused the "oversight function of Congress in keeping account of how the CIA uses its appropriations. It is now "next to impossible," said the President, for the executive branch to consult with Congress on CIA activities in a way that safeguards essential secrets.

The President might also have spoken to the press gallery. It is also next to impossible to keep leaked information about the CIA from getting into newspapers and on television.

While Mr. Ford spared newsmen in his speech, CIA Director William E. Colby got directly to this aspect of the problem in a talk to a luncheon meeting at the annual convention of the American Newspaper Publishers' Association in New Orleans. The CIA is currently the No. 1 topic of sensational journalism in America, both jeopardizing our national security and, as Mr. Colby points out, obscuring "the real nature of modern intelligence and its contribution to our country."

Our CIA agents are risking their lives to obtain information about

the operations of foreign intelligence agencies. Their adversaries are obtaining the same kind of information about our intelligence agencies by buying a copy of an American news magazine or newspaper. This must make us the laughingstock in foreign capitals.

In the arena of competitive journalism there is a grave responsibility for reporters and editors to distinguish between "nonsecrets," information which a government agency has no legitimate right to suppress, and what Mr. Colby calls "good secrets," information which cannot be disclosed without clear and direct harm to our national security. The Fourth Estate is due for some serious soul-searching on the way it has failed to distinguish between the two.

There is no excuse of competitive pressure to account for the loose handling of secrets by members of Congress and government employees who are the source of information which finds its way into the hands of reporters. If a member of Congress thinks the way to compete for headlines or political applause is to parade CIA secrets before the public -- including our enemies -- that it is the responsibility of the congressional leadership to see that his access to such secrets is cut off. It is up to Congress to prevent a potential catastrophe which could result if the United States loses its ability to wage the undercover war being conducted by intelligence agents throughout the world.